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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/18/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: ONITSHA VIOLENCE; CURFEW IMPOSED

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons (b/d).

¶1. (SBU) Violent clashes during the past few days in Onitsha involving the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the police, the Anambra Vigilante Service (AVS), and the National Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO) left at least 12 confirmed deaths, many more wounded and significant property damage. A jail was razed with an estimated 200 inmates escaping in the process. Facing his stiffest test since assuming office several months ago after winning a three year electoral tribunal case, Anambra State Governor Peter Obi imposed a curfew effective June 18 to 24, between 7pm and 6am. Obi's Special Advisor on Media Affairs Mike Udah told Econoff the curfew was imposed to stop MASSOB and NARTO members from skirmishing with local police and Onitsha citizens over collection of motor transport fees.

¶2. (C) Udah reported four separate skirmishes, one on June 15 when alleged MASSOB members burned down two police stations, and two on June 16 and June 17 sparked by NARTO. Finally on June 19, alleged MASSOB members burned down Onitsha Prison and released over 200 inmates. He said NARTO is funded by People's Democratic Party (PDP) Chieftain Chris Uba, and NARTO members are likely using MASSOB as a guise to cover their activities and stir violence. Governor Obi's Chief of Staff Chucks Iloegbunam claimed many MASSOB members may also be NARTO members, and vice versa. He said NARTO is an illegal organization outlawed by the Anambra State House of Assembly in 2005 for its attacks on Anambra State government buildings, including former Governor Ngige's residence on November 10, 2004. For political reasons, they claim MASSOB as the instigator of violence to shield themselves and Chris Uba from allegations of collusion.

¶3. (C) Iloegbunam told Econoff on June 20 that the police and security forces have received orders to arrest and detain MASSOB, NARTO or Anambra Vigilance Service (AVS) members. AVS was former Governor Ngige's security force responsible for protecting the Governor and his family. However, Governor Obi does not employ AVS members, and has refused to pay them the money they claim Ngige owed them. Disgruntled AVS members are joining NARTO to help foment disturbances, Udah claimed.

¶4. (C) Chief Onwuka Ukwa, a senior advisor in the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) claimed that Uba is behind these disturbances. (APGA is the Igbo-based political party to which Governor Obi belongs. Uba is a member of the PDP.) According to Ukwa, APGA believes that Uba is causing these disturbances to put the recently installed Obi on the defensive so that he cannot consolidate power as the 2007 elections draw near. Uba would like things to get so bad

that a state of emergency is declared by President Obasanjo or at the very least, Obi would be so preoccupied with a constant share of emergencies that he will not be able to do much else while governor. Either way, Obi will appear to be ineffectual and thus susceptible to defeat in 2007. (Comment: In a recent conversation, Uba told us that his older brother, Andy Uba, has his eyes on the Anambra gubernatorial seat. Andy is one of President Obasanjo's closest advisors. End comment.)

¶5. (C) Comment. This is not the first time this type of violence has sparked in Onitsha. Given that elections are approaching, this also will not be the last time. Whether the miscreants are from NARTO, MASSOB, AVS or another organization, the severity of these disturbances indicate that their pedigree is more than just a squabble over motor transport fees. The notion that Chris Uba is involved is too attractive to resist, given his antecedents. End comment.

BROWNE